

TURNING POINT

Cory Dunn

Cory Dunn, a US molecular biologist, celebrated his first year as an assistant professor at Koç University in Istanbul, Turkey, last September. Since arriving, he has helped to build a molecular biology department and has earned an installation grant from the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO).

How was college pivotal to your career?

I was studying biology at the University of Toledo in Ohio in preparation for studying medicine. I grew up in Ohio, had barely ever left the state, and planned to stay there. In my junior year, as part of an exchange programme, I was sent to the University of Salford, UK. Gaining a sense of another world of science overseas shook my vision of what was possible. I took upper-level courses there — biochemistry and molecular genetics. That led me to a science PhD at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, and into research rather than becoming a doctor.

What is it about research that captivates you?

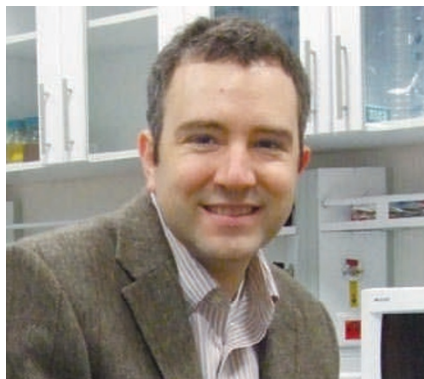
I want to learn new things. Making discoveries is like a game, and it's fun to design experiments. I'm always looking for the 'smoking gun' experiment to prove the point.

How did you come to move to Turkey?

After a postdoc at Columbia University in New York, I was eager to start my independent career. My wife, also a Johns Hopkins graduate, is from Turkey, and we decided to investigate research options there, because finding a position in the United States would require more postdoctoral work. US universities don't even want to see you without a National Institutes of Health new-investigator grant. The Turkish government has been pumping money into research and development. Koç University is a private university with a top-notch faculty. This was a big move, but not impulsive. They wanted someone to help found a department of molecular biology — a rare opportunity.

How did you convince them you were the right one to help found the department?

I told them about my interest, my family situation and my desire to meet in person. They said they wouldn't hire us as a couple, but my wife's record spoke for itself. She got a position. Last year, we hired our third faculty member — a Turkish citizen, coming from Harvard University in Cambridge, Massa-



chusetts. We're working to build the department, with two to three more hires in the next few months.

Are you going to focus on one topic, or hire for excellence?

I can see pluses and minuses to both approaches, but we decided that we want good people rather than a department based on, say, neuroscience or cancer. Simply hiring ambitious, smart people is best for morale. Interdisciplinary connections will come alive when you get the best people.

What has been the biggest challenge?

There is a lot of learning because this is a different culture, but it has been exciting to order equipment, establish policies and design classes. Everything is imported, so things can take longer when relying on import companies. But we've learned to plan ahead and work collaboratively. One thing that I have found challenging is learning Turkish. Everyone speaks English on campus so I haven't been pushed, but I am learning slowly.

How will the EMBO grant help your research?

External funding is good for our university as we try to promote opportunities. The research profile of Turkey is not well recognized, but there are good people doing molecular biology, chemistry and physics. So being able to talk about what's going on here, and encourage people to check it out, will help us to make connections in Europe.

Do you think you'll be in Turkey for long?

You can't predict the future, but we're happy here. We're doing everything to make this the best molecular biology department in Turkey, with a shining reputation in Europe. ■

INTERVIEW BY VIRGINIA GEWIN

EMPLOYMENT

US scientists keep jobs

Unemployment rates for US biological and physical scientists remains low compared with rates for the general population, according to 2010 data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). In the Current Population Survey, a poll of 60,000 households conducted by the US Census Bureau, geoscientists and environmental scientists reported 2.2% unemployment; chemists and materials scientists 3.1%; medical scientists 4.1%; and biologists 4%. Rates for each occupation in 2009 were 4.6%, 4.5%, 4.2% and 3.5%, respectively. The average rate of joblessness for the general population in 2010 was 9.6%. Richard Freeman, an economist at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, says scientists with doctorates are much more likely to be employed than are those with only bachelors' or masters' degrees.

US NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

Data policy takes effect

The US National Science Foundation (NSF) has implemented a 'data management plan' for its grant applicants, in effect from 18 January. Applicants are asked to specify, in no more than two pages, how data generated through their grants will be accessed, archived and shared — this includes revealing the types of data and other materials that will be produced, creating policies for data distribution and plans for archiving, and making provisions for accessing and sharing the data. These could, for example, address confidentiality and intellectual-property concerns. Announced last May, the guidelines let individual NSF divisions tailor the policy to their discipline's needs.

AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE

French recruitment

The French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) in Paris is recruiting 50 junior scientists from around the world to develop healthy and sustainable food systems, mitigate greenhouse-gas emissions and adapt agriculture and forestry to climate change. The hirings are part of a scheme to recruit and retain junior and senior researchers. Recruitment ends on 24 February; applicants should have a doctorate and preferably a postdoc, says Thierry Boujard, INRA director of human resources. Those hired will become civil servants with starting salaries of US\$36,000–\$44,600. Tenure is possible after a year.